

XIX. Romans in Biblical Perspective

The Gospel of God

“My Sure Defense: The Righteousness of God – Part 1”

Romans 3:21–31

Dr. Harry L. Reeder, III

August 8, 2021 • Sunday Morning Sermon

Our text for this study is Romans 3:21–31 but I won't be dealing specifically with Romans 3:27–31 for we'll come back to that in the next study. This is such a foundational text and the girders of the superstructure that your life is built around. This is a glorious text of Scripture so we need to spend a little more time in it to work our way through it. Let's look now in Romans 3:21–26 which says *[21] But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— [22] the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: [23] for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, [24] and are justified by His grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, [25] whom God put forward as a propitiation by His blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in His divine forbearance He had passed over former sins. [26] It was to show His righteousness at the present time, so that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.* The grass withers, the flower fades, the Word of our God abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

Salvation is for all kinds of people, why? It is because all of have sinned – Jew and Gentile. Now Paul has brought us there. This text not only brings to a conclusion what Paul has been teaching us in his exposition of the Gospel of God, but it launches us into the next two chapters where he will explain what he now has given to us. Having given us the bad news, Paul gives us the essentials of the Gospel. So, we will take a couple of studies to work through Romans 3:21–31. This is so foundational for the Christian life. It is the girders that everything in your life is fastened around in the superstructure.

Since the ascension of Jesus Christ, the Spirit of God has been doing His work for the church of God to be established to accomplish its mission, with its message through its God-ordained ministries. The Spirit of God has done some very special things at some special times. When the Spirit of God came upon that first church of the 120 in Jerusalem, He came with power. Then there is Pentecost as the Gospel explodes in Jerusalem. Then there is the repetition of Pentecost as it goes to Judea, Samaria and then to the world. We see this explosive movement of the Gospel and the power of the Spirit of God lifting up Christ as He brings men and women to Himself gloriously – turning sinners right side up that turns the world upside down.

As that is being done, Satan begins to strike back and the church has to undergo periods of superficiality, ritualism, corruption, unfaithfulness, apostacy and the Spirit of God reaches in through God-raised up leaders who will be faithful to the Word of God to bring revival, renewal, and Gospel awakenings. Perhaps the most powerful of all since Pentecost has been the Reformation. The Reformation was summarized as the reformers worked their way through the issues of the day in the superstition, superficiality and sensuality of the church that had invaded the leadership of the church. As the Apostolic ministry was reclaimed, the Gospel with clarity was proclaimed and there were some statements the reformers began to use in the next generation.

We use them on Reformation Sunday. The reformers would love to use the most precise language, other than Greek, and that is Latin. Do you remember the five solas? Sola Scriptura – the Scripture alone. Sola Gratia – grace alone. Sola fida – faith alone. Solus Christus – in Christ alone. Soli Deo Gloria – the glory of God alone. The Scripture alone is our only rule of faith and practice – not the culture, not the applause of men. One of the most foundational issues is the deconstruction of Biblical magisterium in today’s errors to temporary errors in progressive Christianity – to move from Biblical magisterium to cultural magisterium. The Scriptures lead us to the glorious reclamation of foundational doctrine of all of the Bible – the Gospel of God. That we are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, why? It is for the glory of God alone. It is no boasting of men for our boast is in the Lord for it is in the Lord, by the Lord and through the Lord that we are saved and kept.

In my study I have immersed myself in this text because it was this text that every one of those five statements in Latin came from. The role of Romans went from Augustine, to Luther to Calvin, to Knox, Edwards, Whitfield and that brought clarity to these men of the faith. It should not be a surprise to us that the Apostle Paul had his law degree from the school of Gamaliel and you can see the lawyer’s mind and methods that the Holy Spirit is using as Paul has introduced to us the Gospel. Romans 1:16–17 says *[16] For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. [17] For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith.”*

In the Romans 1 through 3 Paul adopts the position of a prosecuting attorney. He brings us to a Day that almost every single one of us tries to avoid even thinking about. Hebrews 9:27–28 says *[27] And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, [28] so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for Him.* There is coming a time you will get out of bed but you will not come back to it. Paul has brought to us on this day, using the 39 books of the Old Testament, to tell us what will happen on that Day when Christ is the Judge. He is marching all of humanity before the bar of Divine justice on that Day so he has taken three chapters of Romans to show us what will happen on that Day. We fool ourselves to thinking our thoughts are secret, unknown and we won’t give an account, but Paul tells us all will be revealed on that Day.

Think of this; when a person has been captured for some heinous crime and the prosecuting attorney is interviewed by saying ‘I promise you that this person will be prosecuted according to their crimes to the full extent of the law.’ Just so you don’t get disappointed, seldom does that happen today but on Judgment Day when all will appear before Christ the holy Judge, it will – to the full extent of the Law. Paul has already given to us the indictment and those being indicted on that Day.

I have summed up the preceding chapters we have studied with four statements. The first statement is on that Day the indictment and the indicted – all – will appear under the Law, if you’re not in Christ and will be prosecuted to the full extent of the Law. The Law of God shuts every mouth, for we won’t have anything to say. Our guilt in thought, word and deed will be displayed and obvious. God made us for His glory, sustains us and gives us our breath for His glory and if you’re not in Christ you will be indicted and prosecuted under the Law of God.

Secondly, all of humanity is under sin. Paul chose his words carefully for he didn’t say all appear having sin even though that’s true, but on that Day all will be under sin – under the power of sin, under the penalty of sin and under the gaze of a holy Judge who says ‘by no means

will I leave the guilty unpunished' (Nahum 1:3) and everyone will answer to that God for their sins to the full extent of the Law and the holiness of God.

Thirdly, all of humanity is defenseless for Paul has dismantled every possible defense strategy. This includes the religion of irreligion by paganism in Romans 1 – guilty. Also, man-made religion and its hypocrisy – guilty. Also, people using true religion thinking their embrace of true religion will save them, when the point of true religion is to bring you to the Savior and is to mature you for the Savior. Paul has pronounced to those who think the privileges and presence of true religion will save is also guilty.

Fourthly, all of humanity is helpless and hopeless. All will stand before the Judgment Seat of God and has no hope. God's justice is inflexible. On that day it will be applied with righteousness. We are spiritually impotent and we're guilty legally, dead in our sins. On that Day we have no options. Paul basically says in Romans 3:20 that the prosecution rests for **all** have sinned and come short of the glory of God.

Then in this epistle, Paul amazingly leaves the prosecutor's table, walks solemnly through the Divine court of justice and comes to the table of the defense with all of those who are sinfully guilty with no options and utters these words – 'But now...' But, there is a Hope. It's not in any of us for no flesh will be justified by the works of the law. Here we are anticipating the verdict of condemnation. No hope for the verdict innocent – justification, but then Paul says there is a Hope, a sure defense. There is a Redeemer, a redemption. No longer are we in the thousands of years of the promise of our Advocate or in the pictures, presentations, ceremonies and prophesies that are pointing to a Redeemer, but now there is a Redeemer, a sure Hope, a solid Rock, One who can deliver you on that Day and now He is available this day – at the present time. Then Paul walks us through that one sure Defense.

Romans 3:21 says [21] *But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it*— It is not the Law that has the power to provide this righteousness. It is not your works of the Law that can have this righteousness. There is One who has come in your place under the Law and with His work you can be saved with the righteousness of God that is apart from your relationship to the Law.

I love the old Geneva Bible of 1665 where in this translation here they use the legal language of the day which would be appropriate but for many of us it would go right by us. It uses 'to wit' or in witness of this gift of God's righteousness, now manifested. This righteousness of God was witnessed by the Law and the Prophets. They were the schoolmasters, tutors, teachers to teach you your need of a Redeemer, your impotence in redemption but your hope is found in the Redeemer, the Law Giver, who God Himself would supply for those who are under the Law. Let's continue in the text as we see the Law and the Prophets bear witness to the righteousness of God.

Romans 3:22a says [22a] *the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe*. There is your hope and it's not your righteousness which is no righteousness. It is a righteousness apart from the Law through Jesus Christ who you received by faith. Who can believe? Any and all can believe, who put their trust in Him.

Romans 3:22b–23 says [22b] *For there is no distinction: [23] for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*. The reason there is no distinction is because all have sinned and all need a Savior. There is only One who provides salvation that is accessible for all and that One is Jesus Christ who died for this world of sinners to have the door open for their redemption. This Christ comes. You don't have to go get better, for you come just as you are without one plea for Thy blood was shed for me. Who will be declared right on that Day? It will be those

who on this day confess their sins and put their trust in Christ by faith, thus are written in the book of Life.

There is coming a day when you and I are no longer grieving and we stand before God. On that Day we are either in Immanuel's land – glory or we fall short of glory and because of our sins, we're not under the glory of God for eternity but the wrath of God for eternity. Next in the text he tells you how you are saved.

Romans 3:24 says *[24] and are justified by His grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.* You are saved through the redeeming work of Christ. Christ, the Mediator, has come in your place and lived the life you couldn't live and died the death that you don't want to die on the cross. Christ buys us back and pays the ransom. His ransom isn't paid to Satan or the world for He lays down His life as a sacrifice for us. His life blood pours out and on the cross all of the unmixed wrath of God for every sin in word, thought and deed for all of His people for all of eternity fell upon Him and He drank the cup of the wrath of God as He paid for us. He is our Advocate because He is our Mediator.

I want you to remember these three words – sacrifice, substitute, satisfaction. Jesus brings the sacrifice in our place and He brings the sacrifice as a substitute – it is known as a vicarious sacrifice/substitute. In reformed churches this is the reason you don't hear people calling any leader a vicar. There is only one Vicar and that's Jesus. He took our place. I have three children and I now have the great joy of having ten grandchildren. I had the opportunity to share with some of them yesterday the importance of this text and how important what is determined on that Day will be a result of what they do on this day, now.

I praise the Lord for our three children and when we had our first child we had her the right way for when my wife, Cindy, said it was time to go, I put her in the car along with the suitcase and we went to the hospital. When we got to the hospital, I told the nurse to take good care of her, handed her the suitcase and then went to the waiting room which is where fathers belong. Then came the Lamaze movement so on our second child I didn't have time to take the classes but people kept telling me I needed to be in the delivery room so I was in the labor room and it really is a labor room. When my son started getting close to crowning, because I didn't have the credentials from the Lamaze classes then I had to leave the delivery room. Thus, my second child was born as my wife gave birth.

Then, came my third child and under the pressure of society and all the young couples in our church I went through the Lamaze classes and received the credentials from the class so I was able to stay in the labor and delivery room. The whole time I'm in the delivery room I'm asking myself 'what am I doing here, I am in the way, but I'm doing what I'm supposed to do.' There was this machine that was attached to my wife that would graph the intensity of the contractions for the doctor and nurse but I noticed that every time the labor pains came, they were getting bigger and bigger and more often. Right before they came there was this clicking and I noticed that right has that clicking would happen I would get this pain in my stomach. I asked the doctor what was happening to me and he said 'that is your failed attempt to take the pain away from your wife – it's a vicarious labor pain.'

That's not a great illustration but that is what Jesus does – but now, Christ, the One who is the Judge on that Day, left the bench and went to the cross this day and took away the judgment of God's wrath for your sin. Why? It was grace. You didn't want Him to and you didn't ask Him to. He didn't need you but He loves you and He wanted you. By grace you can receive that, not by works. You will do works for Him but you won't do works for your

salvation because He did that on the cross. He is the One who has provided for you your verdict of innocent on that Day. You are now justified. Look back at the text.

Romans 3:25 says [25] *whom God put forward as a **propitiation** by His blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in His divine forbearance He had passed over former sins.*

The words propitiation and expiation are words that are so theologically powerful. Propitiation is an economic term meaning satisfaction. When Jesus said 'It is finished' as He was on the cross it meant the payment had been made satisfactorily. The Substitute gave Himself as a sacrifice and it satisfied the wrath of God, because of the love of God who sent Christ, who drank the cup of wrath to give you the eternal cup of life. Both of these words are pictured for us in the Old Testament.

In the Old Testament as the Day of Atonement was approaching there was a scape goat. The priest put his hands on the scape goat and led out of the walls of the city as it was sent away from the covenant people of God. Sent away is expiation. That was bearing witness to Jesus. Jesus, the Son of God became the scape goat of God. Here is another word – imputation. This is an accounting term which means to credit something to someone's account. When the priest lays his hands and confesses the sins of God's covenant people, the scape goat in this ceremonial picture is showing us what needs to happen – that is God needs to send a true scape goat. Therefore, the scape goat was led out to take the sins away from us.

God takes our sins from us as far as the east is from the west (Psalm 103:12). He will remember our sins legally against us no more (Hebrews 8:12). He has taken them outside the city and then the priest would lay hands of imputation upon the lamb, who would then be sacrificed – telling us we need the Lamb of God, who with His sacrifice will make propitiation. He will satisfy, but now the scape goat of God has been manifest. Romans 8:1 says [1] *There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.* Then He makes the payment for your sins and they are remembered to your account no more. Psalm 32:1–2 says [1] *Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. [2] Blessed is the man against whom the LORD counts no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit.*

We the cursed are now the blessed because our curse was imputed to Him. He took it outside the camp when He took it outside the walls to Golgotha. II Corinthians 5:21 says [21] *For our sake He (God the Father) made Him (Jesus) to be sin who knew no sin (imputation), so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.* Jesus knows no sin for He has a clean record through the righteousness of God. My record is under sin – helpless, hopeless and under the Law. He knew sin on our behalf – substitute, vicarious – at the cross He paid for those sins with His redeeming work for us. Hell's doors are shut for Jesus paid for it but heaven is for the righteous – we become the righteousness of God in Him.

There are two acts of imputation. My sin went to Him as He paid for it. Then He gives His righteousness to me. Every time God sees me, He sees the perfect righteousness of His Son, Jesus. I'm not only forgiven but I'm accepted. Justification is only half of it and it's a legal term. It's the opposite of condemnation and condemnation is guilty. Justification is innocent, not just forgiven. Heaven is for the righteous. My righteousness is like filthy rags and the only place for me to get a perfect righteousness is through the One who took away my sins. We are cleansed from our sin and clothed with His righteousness through Him.

The other day I received this great book but sometimes I'd like to choke the person who invented bubble wrap because sometimes I can't get into what I just received due to how it's wrapped. I want you to know that you are bubble wrapped to be delivered to glory, for you are

wrapped in the perfect righteousness of Christ, having cleansed you with His blood He clothed you with His righteousness. Oh the praise and glory we give to God because of that and what He has done is so marvelous! I love the song titled *Lord, I Need You* that says;

*Lord, I need You, oh I need You
Every hour, I need You
My one defense, my righteousness
Oh God, how I need You*

There is another glorious hymn from the Getty's titled *In Christ Alone* and I love the verse that says;

*In Christ alone, Who took on flesh,
Fullness of God in helpless babe!
This gift of love and righteousness,
Scorned by the ones He came to save.
'Til on that cross as Jesus died,
The wrath of God was satisfied
For ev'ry sin on Him was laid
Here in the death of Christ I live.*

Christ and Him crucified – there is my sure defense, my defender, my hope, my sacrifice, my substitute – the absolutely glorious work of Christ, where in His act of obedience He performed righteousness to take me to heaven and in His passive obedience on the cross He received my sin to pay for it so that I could have everlasting life. The prosecution rests and I am in the valley of despair – helpless, hopeless, with no defense, and no option – from whence cometh my help? Psalm 121:1–2 says [1] *I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come?* [2] *My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth.* I am not looking at Mount Sinai, I'm looking at Mount Calvary. There is where I look to the Lord for my help comes from Him that I might be everlastingly saved to His glory.

The Good News of the Gospel for helpless and hopeless sinners is that the power of God has provided a righteousness of God, in Christ alone by grace alone through faith alone to the glory of God alone. All of this is in the text of Scripture we have just read. Here is the last verse from Romans 3:26 which says [26] *It was to show His righteousness at the present time, so that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.*

How can the unjust be justified and God still be just? How can the guilty be declared innocent? Notice how our courts never give an innocent verdict, for it's always – not guilty of the charges or innocent of the charges. Do you know why this is? It is because Christianity formed our judicial system, for there is nobody innocent. The trial is to find out whether a person is not guilty of the charges or innocent of the charges, but when you get to the Divine bar of God's justice you can hear this verdict – innocent, your sins are removed, you're redeemed – you are bought back and His righteousness clothes you.

How can the guilty be innocent and God be holy? How can the condemned be cleared and God be true? How can those who are called all wrong be called all right and God still be righteous? Here's how – but now...in Christ.

I want to close where I began. But now, this day we are under sin, helpless and hopeless if we are apart from Christ, but now this day we can be declared innocent. No condemnation – justified in Christ, by grace, through faith. But now, where are you? There is coming a time and man does not know His time but we will get out of bed and not come back to it for there is coming a day you will take your last breath. And on that Day we stand before the bar of Divine

justice to be prosecuted to the extent of the Law under the absolute holiness of God which cannot be compromised. This day this holy God has made a way to be just and justified – you through His Son who takes your place and gives you His righteousness by grace through faith. So what will you do this day, right now?

Perhaps you are saying you have already received His gift of salvation and I say praise the Lord for you will be filled increasingly with the joy of the Lord. You will have peace with God, not peace of mind and you will have the peace of God. You will be inoculated against all these manipulative agendas through all these social medias, political and sociological, because of Him who is in you and you are in Him. His joy, His triumph is yours and in Him you are redeemed by your Redeemer.

Or are you a pawn of the world, still looking for help and hope and where there is no help and hope for there is only One and that's Jesus. So on that Day to hear 'innocent' on this day come to Christ. Praise God there is only one death bed conversion, but only one lest any of us be presumptuous. That thief on the cross, confessed Christ while on a cross, put his trust in Him and Jesus said to him 'This day you will be with Me in paradise.' Can you imagine when the thief gets there and a person might say 'we're you baptized?' 'Nope.' 'Did you know the shorter catechism question on justification?' 'Nope.' 'Have you read through the Bible yet.' 'Nope.' 'So, how do you expect to get in here?' 'The Man next to me on the cross said 'today I'll be with Him.'"

My hope, my sure defense is Christ who is my righteousness. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Lord, thank You for the moments we could be together in Your Word. Please Holy Spirit speak to the hearts of those reading this today and please do not let them put off this day that they will be found unclothed on that Day. This day is the day of salvation and for those who know You fill us with such joy that we will not be deterred by the world from Your mission, Your message, and Your ministry, but we'll be filled to overflowing with Christ and if He is lifted up by His people He will draw all kinds of people to Himself. Anyone reading this who has not yet come to Jesus, may this day they be ready for that Day and set the ground work for every day filled with glory instead of falling short in despair and judgment – lifted up in redemption by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, our sure Defense, our Righteousness. If you would like to pray with someone about your walk with the Lord or making a commitment to the Lord please contact us at Briarwood at (205) 776-5200 for we'd love to talk and pray with you this day. Please take advantage of this. We give You praise Lord, in Jesus' Name, Amen.

Power Point

THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD IN CHRIST

The Indictment and the Indicted

- All of Humanity is "under the Law"
- All of Humanity is "under sin"
- All of Humanity is Defenseless
- All of Humanity is Helpless and Hopeless

"By works of the Law no one is justified"

The Prosecution Rests

BUT NOW

The Good News of the Gospel for helpless and hopeless sinners is the power of God has provided a righteousness of God in Christ alone, by grace alone, through faith alone, to the glory of God alone. {note}

LIFE TAKEAWAY

Let's simply conclude where we began...

- *But Now...we are under sin –helpless and hopeless apart from Christ.*
- *But Now...we can be “justified”–in Christ, by grace and through faith.*
- *But Now...???*